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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2016/4, highlights the situation of Palestinian women for the period from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016, and provides an overview of the assistance provided by the entities of the United Nations system with regard to education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2016/4 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, resulting from the severe impact of the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation and all of its manifestations. The Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2016/6), and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-first session a report, on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016 and reviews the situation of Palestinian women on the basis of information from the United Nations entities in the State of Palestine.

3. Unless indicated otherwise, the report is based on contributions and information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women. It includes contributions from the following United Nations entities: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It also includes information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

4. The present report complements other reports on the living and socioeconomic conditions of the Palestinian people (see A/71/87-E/2016/67, A/71/359-S/2016/732, A/71/86-E/2016/13 and A/71/13).

II. Situation of Palestinian women

5. The reporting period witnessed substantial efforts by the international community to advance peace and to preserve the two-State solution. The Middle East Quartet Principals met on 23 October 2015 in Vienna and called for significant steps to be taken by the parties, consistent with the transition contemplated by prior agreements, in order to restore confidence and hope in the viability of a negotiated two-State solution that resolves the final status issues, including that of Jerusalem, and ends the occupation that began in 1967. In accordance with its decision on

12 February 2016, the Quartet issued a report in July[1] outlining three negative trends imperilling the viability of the two-State solution: violence against civilians and the incitement that fuels it; the Israeli policy of expanding settlements, the taking of land for exclusive Israeli use and denying Palestinian development; and the situation in Gaza, marked by the lack of Palestinian unity, continued militant activity and a dire humanitarian crisis, augmented by a restrictive closure regime. It offered recommendations for creating the conditions for an eventual return to meaningful negotiations, and called on the parties to take action independently, in line with their commitments under previous agreements, that can realistically contribute to progress towards establishing a two-State reality on the ground.

6. Meanwhile, on 17 May 2016, the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, called on Israeli, Palestinian and Arab leaders to take historic steps for peace, expressing the readiness of Egypt to contribute to these endeavours and to help facilitate intra-Palestinian reconciliation. On 3 June, France hosted a Ministerial meeting at which participants from 28 delegations reaffirmed support for a two-State solution and discussed ways in which the international community could contribute to this goal, including by providing incentives. In follow-up, France expressed its intention of convening an international conference, now planned for early 2017. The possibility of a direct meeting between the parties has also been advanced by other key international stakeholders.

7. The rates of settlement planning and construction rose during the reporting period. The first three quarters of 2016 saw a 25 per cent increase in construction starts over the equivalent period in 2015, owing to a spike during the second quarter of 2016 registering the highest quarterly rate in three years. The classification of new "state land" in the Jordan Valley, the approval of several plans in settlements and a surge in demolitions of Palestinian structures in Area C of the West Bank during the first quarter also appear to reflect a systematic policy to expand Israeli presence and limit Palestinian development in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Since 1 April, settlement plans have been advanced for at least 2,400 units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel also advanced the so-called retroactive "legalization" of outposts, and, since July, Members of Knesset have resumed efforts to promote a bill aimed at legalizing settlement units built on privately owned Palestinian land.

8. The absence of Palestinian reconciliation impedes efforts to achieve a negotiated solution. In reconciliation talks between Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian factions, which were hosted by Qatar in 2016, as well as efforts by Egypt and other regional stakeholders, no consensus has been reached on achieving genuine Palestinian unity on the basis of non-violence, democracy and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Principles — crucial for reuniting the West Bank and Gaza under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian authority. The parties remain divided on two main issues: the formation of a national unity Government based on PLO principles, and the organization of parliamentary and presidential elections. Municipal council elections, which were originally set for 8 October 2016, with the participation of nearly all major Palestinian factions, were to be the first simultaneous elections in Gaza and the West Bank since 2006. However, on 4 October, the Palestinian Government decided to postpone local

[1] S/2016/595, annex.

elections until further notice. That decision followed the suspension on 8 September of election preparations by the High Court in Ramallah.

9. The reporting period saw a sharp increase in violence, in the last quarter of 2015, in East Jerusalem, with protests, clashes and individual attacks by Palestinians on Israeli civilians and security personnel spreading to the other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including to the access restricted areas in Gaza, and Israel. Palestinians continued to be subjected to threats to their lives, physical safety and liberty from conflict-related violence and from policies and practices related to the Israeli occupation, including settler violence. In the last quarter of 2015, the highest number of casualties among West Bank Palestinians and among Israelis since 2005 was recorded. The violence began to wane in early 2016, owing in large part to effective efforts by the Palestinian National Security Forces, who successfully thwarted attacks, seized weapons and arrested suspected extremists. Continued security coordination between both sides was also key to reducing violence. There nevertheless remains a growing concern that ongoing settlement activity, incitement to violence, cases of excessive use of force by Israel and the absence of genuine Palestinian unity may lead to a renewed escalation.

10. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016, 235 Palestinians (168 men, 14 women, 48 boys and 5 girls) were killed and over 16,556 (82 per cent men, 1 per cent women, 19 per cent boys and 1 per cent girls) were injured, mainly by the Israel Defense Forces or by settlers to some extent across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. Many of the Palestinians were killed while carrying out, or reportedly carrying out, knife, gun or car-ramming attacks. A total of 32 Israelis (25 men, 6 women and 1 girl), most of whom were members of the Israel Defense Forces, were killed by Palestinians, and more than 341 others were injured.

11. Among the main concerns relating to the increase in violence were Palestinian attacks on Israelis and the response of Israeli security forces, including possible instances of excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings. These concerns were compounded by the chronic lack of accountability and effective remedy for the killing of Palestinians. For example, from October 2015 to June 2016, the Israeli authorities opened a total of 24 criminal investigations into incidents resulting in the death or injury of Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel, including the highly controversial apparent extrajudicial killing on 24 March 2016 of a reported assailant who was incapacitated. Of these investigations, one has led to the indictment and prosecution of a soldier.

12. The Palestinian Government launched an investigation into the apparent extrajudicial execution while in police custody by Palestinian security forces on 23 August 2016 of a Nablus man who was suspected of involvement in the previous killing of two security personnel. Questions remain regarding accountability for such acts.

13. UNICEF reported a concerning number of incidents of grave violations against children documented in 2015 and 2016. From October 2015 to September 2016, 3,205 incidents were documented, affecting 61,667 children. This included the killings of 57 children (56 Palestinian children — 7 girls and 49 boys — and 1 Israeli girl) and injury of 2,384 children (2,271 Palestinian boys and 113 girls, and 7 Israeli boys and 2 girls). In addition, 448 attacks on schools were documented.

14. As at August 2016, an estimated 11,700 Gazan families (almost 60,000 people) — of which about 10 per cent are female-headed households — remained displaced and are living with host families, in rented apartments, in prefabricated units, or in the rubble of their previous homes.[2] The root causes of the conflict remained unaddressed as the land, air and sea closures of Gaza entered their eleventh year. Accountability for victims remains unaddressed and, as local non-governmental organizations and legal aid providers report, access to justice mechanisms remains severely limited.[3] The Israeli authorities received complaints relating to approximately 360 incidents, which led to the opening of 31 criminal investigations and indictments in a single instance of looting.

15. A fragile ceasefire in Gaza continues to hold. The beginning of May saw the most serious escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas since the 2014 conflict, with the discovery by Israel of two tunnels and, as a response, nine incursions to destroy them. Militants fired some 45 mortars and rockets at Israel and the Israel Defense Forces conducted 13 airstrikes: one woman was killed and several other Palestinians were injured during the exchanges. On 21 August, two rockets were fired from Gaza, without causing injury or damage. Israeli forces responded with some 60 missiles and shells to various locations in Gaza, directed at Hamas bases and those of other militants. Five people were reported injured during the operation. These incidents highlight the fragility of the security dynamics in Gaza and the need for all sides to vigorously uphold the ceasefire.

16. The reporting period also saw a massive surge in demolitions by the Israeli authorities of Palestinian property in the West Bank, primarily in Area C and East Jerusalem, citing a lack of building permits. Such permits are almost impossible to obtain owing to the seemingly discriminatory and unlawful planning regime applied in those areas. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016, the authorities demolished or confiscated 971 Palestinian-owned structures, displacing over 1,500 people and affecting the livelihoods of more than 6,500 people.

17. Several factors continue to present significant barriers to freedom of movement and access to livelihoods for Palestinians, with differing impacts on women and men. The population of 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza remains effectively isolated from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, by the continued closure of Gaza by Israel and the highly infrequent opening of the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza. Access to East Jerusalem remains limited for Palestinian residents from the remainder of the West Bank. Physical and administrative restrictions continue to impede humanitarian access to some of the most vulnerable communities in Area C, particularly those in the firing zones and those located behind the barrier.

18. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the Palestinian labour force reached 1.3 million in 2015, 3.5 per cent higher than in 2014. With a concurrent 3.4 per cent increase in the population aged 15 and above, the labour

[2] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Gaza: two years since the 2014 hostilities (August 2016).

[3] See, for example, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, "Update: no reparations in Israel for Palestinians: how Israel's amendment No. 8 leaves no room for room for recourse, Gaza, December 2015" (24 February 2016), available from http://mezan.org/en/post/20954.

force participation rate remained unchanged at 45.8 per cent (71.9 per cent for men, 19.1 per cent for women). The labour force participation of women remains extremely low by global as well as by regional standards, despite high levels of educational attainment on the part of Palestinian women, resulting in a substantial loss of economic potential. The overall rate of unemployment eased slightly, from 27 per cent in 2014 to 25.9 per cent in 2015 (336,300 people), owing to improvement in male employment. The unemployment rate for women increased only slightly, to 39.2 per cent (from 38.55 per cent, as recorded in 2014). In Gaza, women's unemployment rose to a staggering 60 per cent. A gender wage gap persisted, with the average daily wage for Palestinian women reaching NIS 81.9, compared with NIS 108 for men.[4] The unemployment rate for youth aged 20-24 years stood high in 2015, at 36.5 per cent,[5] and rose further, to 42.6 per cent, in 2016.[6]

19. Women's access to health services was monitored and analysed in 2015 and 2016 through analysis by WHO of permit data disaggregated by sex for patients seeking access out of Gaza and the West Bank to medical facilities in East Jerusalem and elsewhere. Health access through the Erez checkpoint declined sharply in 2016, as the approval rates in the first seven months of the year decreased to 74.8 per cent for females and to 66.2 per cent for males, the lowest rates recorded since 2009. This signified a 12 per cent drop in approval rates for both female and male patients, as compared with a similar period in 2015.[7] According to data provided by the Coordination Office of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, in 2015, 25 per cent of patients requested for Israeli security interviews in the context of permit applications were female. In 2016, the percentage of females rose to 33 per cent.

20. The adolescent birth rate (the fertility rate for women aged 15-19) remained concerning, at 48 per 1,000 (35 per 1,000 in the West Bank and 66 per 1,000 in Gaza). Among women aged 20-24, 22 per cent had had at least one live birth before age 18 (25 per cent in Gaza and 20 per cent in the West Bank).

21. Lack of access to safe, sufficient and affordable water remains of critical concern. In Gaza, only 10 per cent of households have access to clean drinking water.[8] It is estimated that at least 96 per cent of the water from the coastal aquifer in Gaza is unfit for human consumption.[9] In the West Bank, 97 per cent of households have access to clean drinking water;[10] however the quantity of water

[4] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey (2016b) and consumer price index data (2016e).

[5] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey, press release, 25 February 2016.

[6] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force survey, press release, 8 August 2016.

[7] See www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/WHO_monthly_Gaza_access_report-July_2016-_final.pdf?ua=1.

[8] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Palestinian multiple indicator cluster survey 2014" (2015).

[9] WHO, "Report of a field assessment of health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, 22 March to 1 April 2015" (2016).

[10] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestinian Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 (2015).

supply remained insufficient.[11] Around 70 per cent of the Palestinian communities located entirely or mostly in Area C are not connected to a water network and the Government of Palestine has limited ability to provide access to water. The average domestic consumption rate among Palestinians is approximately 40 litres per capita per day in Area C: well below the WHO minimum recommendation of 100 litres per capita per day.[12] Owing to the inadequate quality and quantity of the water available, these communities are forced to buy water at unaffordable rates[13] and Palestinians spend an average of 8 per cent of their monthly expenditure on purchasing water.

22. According to FAO, food insecurity levels among Palestinian households remained high during the reporting period, at 27 per cent (46 per cent in Gaza and 17 per cent in the West Bank).[14] Food insecurity in the Palestinian context is defined as the lack of economic access to food. In the West Bank, the prevalence of food insecurity among female-headed households is 10 percentage points higher than among male-headed households (25 per cent, compared with 15 per cent), while it is 3 percentage points higher for female-headed households in Gaza.[15]

23. Access to early learning opportunities in Palestine is low, with a 57.3 per cent enrolment rate in preschool education (57.7 per cent for boys and 56.9 per cent for girls). Levels of enrolment in basic education are higher: 95 per cent for girls and 93 per cent for boys. However, the net enrolment rate in secondary school is concerning, especially for boys: 59 per cent for boys and 77 per cent for girls in 2015.[16] Anecdotal evidence suggests that girls and children with disabilities are more prone to dropping out of school in areas where they feel unsafe in and on the way to school, such as in military zones and around checkpoints and settlements.

24. Rule of law remains a significant issue across the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Palestinian women face specific challenges in accessing justice as a result of laws that discriminate on the basis of sex, notably with respect to inheritance, child custody and other personal status issues; women's limited knowledge of their rights and procedures; economic dependency; and social pressures and stigma. Even in cases where women manage to access justice services, they often face service providers who lack professional knowledge in dealing specifically with women and girl victims of violence, and who continue to interpret outdated laws pertaining to the Penal Code and personal status law in ways that infringe women's human rights. The State of Palestine has demonstrated its commitment to address women's access to justice through accession to seven human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was endorsed without reservations.

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[11] Consumption per person is 71 litres per day, as compared with the WHO recommendation of 100 litres per person per day — source: "WHO, Report of a field assessment of health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, 22 March to 1 April 2015 (2016).

[12] EWASH, Thirsting for Justice (January 2016).

[13] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview" (2015) p. 8.

[14] FAO, UNRWA, WFP and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Socioeconomic and food security survey 2014: West Bank and Gaza Strip" (unpublished information).

[15] Palestine Food Security Sector and Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, Socioeconomic and food security survey 2014 (May 2016).

[16] Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Baseline M&E report 2015 (2016).

25. In the State of Palestine, women and girls continue to experience multiple types of violence at home and in their communities, including structural violence in the form of discriminatory laws and traditional practices, and physical, economic and psychological violence from family members and intimate partners. Psychosocial violence continues to be the most reported type of violence in Gaza (55 per cent), while in the West Bank psychosocial violence comprise 30 per cent of reported cases, and cases of physical violence comprise another 30 per cent of reported cases. Overall, in 78.5 per cent of cases, the perpetrator was a spouse, parent or sibling, with spouses alone making up 67 per cent of all cases. In 84.3 per cent of cases where a woman was killed, the perpetrator was a family member. While domestic violence constitutes the most prevalent form of violence against women, it should be noted that merely 1.4 per cent of domestic violence cases reach the courts, with 57.6 per cent of women stating that social customs prevent them from filing a complaint.[17] There is also a severe lack of shelters and a social support system, which makes addressing violence against women particularly challenging.[18]

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

26. The United Nations continued its efforts to respond to a range of development and humanitarian challenges. Priorities for United Nations support to the Palestinian people are outlined in a set of key documents, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2014-2016 for the State of Palestine, which is aligned with the Palestinian National Development Plan 2014-2016, and the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan, which outlines the humanitarian programming. An update on assistance provided by the United Nations system, in cooperation with the Government of Palestine, donors and civil society, to address the specific needs and priorities of women and girls in the following areas: education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development, is given in paragraphs 27-63 below.

A. Education and training

27. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives to promote women's and girls' access to education and training and improve learning environments. During the academic year 2015-2016, UNRWA operated 349 schools (252 in Gaza and 96 in the West Bank), serving over 290,400 students. In Gaza, 127,490 girls were enrolled in UNRWA schools (48.5 per cent of the student population), with an annual student increase of approximately 8,000 students. In the West Bank, 28,771 girls (58.8 per cent of the total) were enrolled in UNRWA schools. In addition to basic education, UNRWA continued to offer technical and vocational education training. During the reporting period, 540 girls (32 per cent of

[17] "UN-Women. Impact stories on ending violence against women — specialized prosecution", 2016, available from: http://palestine.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/10/spp#sthash.Fry1yfEu.dpuf.

[18] UNRWA GBV referral system — first quarter of 2016.

all students) in Gaza, and 567 girls (82 per cent of total) in the West Bank participated in such training.

28. In the West Bank, UNICEF and partners provided protective accompaniment presence to school children for safer commutes to school in locations with Israeli military presence and settlers. This benefited 4,667 children (1,670 girls and 2,997 boys) and 333 teachers (180 female and 153 male).

29. UNESCO and partners continued to promote early childhood education by conducting awareness-raising sessions on inclusive and child-friendly education for 980 mothers and training 120 female teachers. School principals and supervisors participated in the project training on inclusive education, action research and child-led activities, benefiting 17,810 female students in 49 schools in the West Bank and Gaza.

30. In East Jerusalem, UNDP in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) provided quality education and counselling services to nearly 8,500 female students in private schools.

31. In Gaza, UNDP has responded to the needs of girls in schools that were damaged during the 2014 conflict. The recovery process has considered and responded to girls' needs on the basis of the principles of building back better and child friendly schools. This includes the adaptation of the school premises, primarily with regard to water and sanitation facilities, to make them accessible to girls with special needs. The rehabilitation and reconstruction of 32 partially damaged educational institutions (12 public schools, 13 private schools and 7 universities/colleges) benefited 37,222 students (19,445 of whom were female).

32. ILO and partners supported 50 unemployed female university graduates from low-income households with skill-building training, followed by three-month temporary job placements in the private sector or community-based organizations. Around 25-30 per cent of the graduates found paid work and the majority indicated that their participation in the programme had increased their hope of finding longer-term employment. In partnership with the Islamic University of Gaza, ILO delivered furniture design training to 20 young female architects experiencing difficulty in finding employment in the architecture sector. Some 15 women architects were trained in basic business concepts, management and entrepreneurship skills and 18 female furniture design trainees received subsidized on-the-job training in furniture manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Gaza.

33. In Gaza, UNRWA enhanced the leadership skills of young women by providing female university graduates with skills that better meet the labour market needs. During the reporting period, 391 women and 34 men participated in the programme. Moreover, 724 young female graduates accessed job placement opportunities in civil society and the private sector.

B. Health

34. The United Nations continued to build upon good practices and results reported in the previous reporting period to improve the access to and the quality of health-care services. UNRWA remained the major provider of primary health-care services for Palestine refugees, operating 21 health centres in Gaza and 42 in the

West Bank. Palestine refugees, who constitute over 70 per cent of the population in Gaza, continued to rely on UNRWA for primary health care. In Gaza, the total number of medical consultations from October 2015 to June 2016 stood at 2,870,183, of which 60 per cent were for women, and 904,058 in the West Bank, where 59 per cent were for women.

35. Maternal and child health care continues to be an essential component of assistance. UNRWA provided assistance to 32,625 newly registered pregnant women, 218,661 women who were receiving antenatal care and 28,303 women who were receiving postnatal care services. A total of 94.8 per cent of all pregnant women paid at least four visits to UNRWA health centres during their pregnancies. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health and partner non-governmental organizations to reach and support a total of 3,532 "high-risk" women and their newborns under the postnatal home visiting programme in Gaza. Over 30,000 women have been reached with nutrition counselling and health education sessions. UNDP supported the rehabilitation of Al-Shifa and Al-Tahrir maternity hospitals, which served 16,000 women in Gaza City and Khan Younis during 2016. UNFPA supported the operation of mobile clinics in 12 communities in Gaza, with 3,681 women, including 1,654 pregnant women, benefiting from mobile clinic services.

36. UNRWA health clinics provided adolescent and adult women refugees with preventive and curative services, including screening for breast cancer and reproductive health-related services. UNDP in partnership with Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem launched a mobile mammography clinic initiative, while in Gaza, UNRWA launched a project to raise awareness of breast cancer. Through UNRWA health centres, 68,382 women were screened for breast cancer and 4,438 were referred for mammograms and scans.

37. UNDP upgraded specialized departments in three East Jerusalem hospitals, thereby allowing more than 6,500 women annually to benefit from improved conditions during the reporting period. It also supported tertiary treatment for vulnerable cardiac patients, including women in Gaza, through the rehabilitation of a floor of the Palestine Red Crescent Society and the construction of two operation rooms for cardiac care.

38. In the first half of 2016, 6,166 women and girls benefited from water network repairs and water tankering supported by UNICEF, while 10,500 women and girls benefited from improved sanitation services. Some 9,000 households in Gaza received e-vouchers for hygiene items and another 14,400 households were provided with sanitation and hygiene items.

39. United Nations entities continued to provide psychosocial support to women and girls across the Occupied Palestinian Territory. UN-Women provided group and individual psychosocial counselling to 1,800 women and girls displaced during the escalation of hostilities in 2014. Through the psychosocial counselling programme, 56 gender-based violence cases were referred to other service providers for further follow-up. In the West Bank, in 21 locations, UNRWA engaged family and child protection committees, which are composed of community-based organization representatives, UNRWA staff, community leaders and the popular refugee committees, to reach more than 6,300 women and girls with support group discussions and awareness-raising events. With UNICEF support, the Ministry of Social Development and other partners reached 32,417 children (of whom 49 per

cent were girls) with psychosocial support services, and 7,987 children (of whom 51 per cent were girls) with community-based child protection services, including in response to gender-based violence.

40. UN-Women provided physiotherapy, conducted by four women physiotherapists, to 16 women with disabilities and also provided necessary medical equipment. Some 30 women with disabilities received psychosocial and legal counselling in Gaza.

C. Economic empowerment and livelihoods

41. Within their development programming, United Nations entities continued to prioritize initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and improve food security and livelihoods.

42. During the reporting period, UN-Women provided technical assistance to 45 women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and 547 beneficiaries to enhance the competitiveness and marketability of their products locally, regionally and internationally through a comprehensive capacity-building, on-the-job coaching programme. Financial assistance was provided for 34 women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

43. In a joint initiative by ILO and UN-Women, a participatory gender audit was conducted for two major Palestinian companies to enhance social responsibility and encourage a transformational change towards gender-responsive working environments.

44. FAO conducted several training sessions on marketing and bookkeeping for 90 women members of six women's cooperatives, to establish an effective finance and credit management system and links with reliable loan service providers. The training and workshops enhanced the women's capacity to manage loans. A total of 59 women from 10 women's cooperatives in the West Bank benefited from training focused on quality control, quality assurance and the application of local and international standards for food processing products.

45. The UNRWA job creation programme employed 17,063 refugees (of whom 26.4 per cent were female). The bulk of jobs (78.9 per cent) offered by the programme require unskilled labour; however, owing to social and cultural barriers, the programme faces challenges in finding culturally acceptable jobs for unskilled women. In the West Bank, the cash-for-work programme employed women as clerks, cleaners, guards, administrative assistants and tutors, among other roles. Over the reporting period, 8,124 labourers participated in the cash-for-work programme, of whom 41.2 per cent were female.

46. In Gaza, the enhanced UNRWA poverty assessment system makes it possible for vulnerable categories of women, such as women in polygamous marriages, widows, divorced women and women living in a state of separation from their husbands, to apply for an independent poverty assessment and receive food assistance from UNRWA separately from the male head of household. During the reporting period, 3,324 women applied for an assessment. Of the 2,082 cases already visited, 68.3 per cent qualified for assistance.

47. In the West Bank, UNRWA used a poverty-based targeting strategy for its social safety net programme that ranks households according to a variety of poverty-related elements. Of 7,613 households, 34 per cent are female-headed households and 55.3 per cent of beneficiaries are women. Priority interventions include essential food requirements, emergency cash intervention, referrals and in-house counselling.

48. Through general food distributions and vouchers, WFP ensured increased food consumption and dietary diversity for 294,818 female beneficiaries, 50 per cent of all beneficiaries. WFP food vouchers empower beneficiaries in managing household needs as they give them the freedom to choose which food commodities they want to buy. Women make the decisions on the use of the vouchers in 87 per cent of cases.

49. As part of reconstruction efforts in Gaza, UNDP provided transitional shelter cash assistance for 1,154 non-refugee families whose homes were damaged during the 2014 escalation of hostilities, with priority given to female-headed households, which comprise 10.7 per cent of the households in Gaza. In East Jerusalem, 150 Palestinian female-headed households benefited directly from improved living conditions through the rehabilitation of 250 homes.

50. ILO implemented a response programme in 2015 to train 50 women sheep breeders on management of sheep farms, life skills, financial and marketing literacy, cooperative work and business group formation. In the West Bank, FAO supported 85 women farmers with the construction of rainwater collection cisterns and facilitated land rehabilitation for five women farmers. In Gaza, FAO supported 65 female-headed households with vegetable and protein production units and rehabilitated 48 damaged animal shelters. In response to shocks, including unusual seasonal weather conditions in the West Bank, 71 women herders received drought-tolerant seeds to enhance their capacity to produce fodder for their animals. Some 30 animal shelters belonging to women herders were rehabilitated and FAO supported 240 women herders in the West Bank and Gaza by providing plastic sheeting for the winterization of animal shelters in preparation for cold weather conditions.

D. Rule of law and violence against women

51. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives designed to improve women's access to justice and enhance the capacity of institutions and personnel to prevent and respond to violence against women.

52. From January to June 2016, through the joint UNDP and UN-Women Rule of Law programme, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 5,248 women received free legal aid and 1,778 received legal rights awareness training. In Gaza, 2,025 women received legal aid and 6,569 received legal rights awareness training. In Gaza, OHCHR conducted training on gender-based violence and the right to life for women's organizations and female traditional community leaders. During the reporting period, and particularly in the context of the aftermath of the 2014 conflict, 2,749 internally displaced persons, including 123 sexual and gender-based violence survivors, received legal assistance through 10 legal aid clinics and 3 additional mobile aid clinics.

53. Through humanitarian response interventions implemented by United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations, 2,564 survivors of gender-based violence (including 107 men) accessed legal services; 2,645 survivors (2,521 women, 124 men) received psychosocial support services; and 19,904 people (17,094 women, 2,810 men) attended gender-based violence awareness-raising sessions or received information on related services. UNRWA continued to operate a gender-based violence referral system in Gaza and the West Bank providing services for Palestinian refugees. During the reporting period, 2,138 gender-based violence cases were identified in Gaza, 92.8 per cent of them against women. At total of 7,129 psychosocial counselling sessions were accessed by gender-based violence survivors and 994 women received legal counselling. In the West Bank, 309 women and girl survivors received support through the community mental health programme, through the mother-to-mother groups and through medical and school counsellors. A total of 11 cases of child marriage were identified through the gender-based violence referral system.

54. During the reporting period, UN-Women worked to improve the quality of services provided to women victims and survivors of gender-based violence in Gaza, with a special focus on internally displaced women. UN-Women interventions reached more than 5,736 beneficiaries (5,194 women and 542 men) with awareness-raising sessions on gender-based violence and related services. UN-Women and civil society partners, mainly the Al-Hayat Centre, the Arab Women's Forum and Wifaq Association, provided more than 131 women victims of gender-based violence with case management support. The Hayat Centre also supported vulnerable and at-risk groups such as women in conflict with the law (17 women) and children of divorced couples (20 children) with case management and reintegration services. UNFPA provided training for 800 service providers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on gender-based violence "detection", response and referral, utilizing the guidelines developed and the Palestinian national referral system. UNFPA supported the establishment of a "one-stop" centre in Jabalia in Gaza, as a pilot phase to serve as a safe space for gender-based violence survivors.

55. UNICEF and UNFPA further supported the development of standard operating procedures for gender-based violence and child protection case management and referral in Gaza. Some 160 Ministry of Social Development social workers, 61 Ministry of Education and Higher Education school counsellors and 38 Ministry of Health medical staff received orientation on the standard operating procedures, detection of gender-based violence and referrals.

56. UNODC continued to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and the Palestinian Civil Police to manage, administer, deliver and expand forensic medicine and forensic science services in accordance with international standards, including with regard to the investigation of cases of gender-based violence. Seven Palestinian doctors continued their specialized training programme in forensic medicine, including the forensic examination of victims of sexual and gender-based violence. UNODC also conducted awareness workshops on gender-based violence and child abuse recognition and response for forensic medicine practitioners, the High Judicial Council, UNRWA refugee camp clinics, local non-governmental organizations and line ministries related to the national referral system for gender-based violence service providers in the State of Palestine.

E. Power and decision-making

57. During the reporting period, UN-Women enhanced women's political participation and leadership by providing technical assistance to 20 female local council members. Of these women, aged 25-45 years, 15 became active members in their councils and villages, voicing women's priorities and needs at local council meetings. In addition, UNDP established and institutionalized local economic development units in five medium-sized municipalities in Gaza, in which women have been assigned as specialists and focal points.

58. In UNRWA schools, 1,964 female students from 132 girls' elementary and preparatory schools participated in the school parliament programme. Female students discussed and engaged peers on a number of issues relating to gender equality, such as reproductive health and early marriage. In the West Bank, UNRWA conducted awareness-raising activities for 435 participants from local communities on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

59. In 2016, UNICEF and local partners reached 6,747 disadvantaged adolescents (48.5 per cent of whom were female) from vulnerable communities with life skills programmes. Nearly 80 per cent of adolescent girls and boys from UNICEF-supported life skills projects are involved in and leading community initiatives. These projects equipped girls with important leadership skills for their participation in decision-making and community life.

F. Institutional development

60. During the reporting period, OHCHR continued to support the State of Palestine in strengthening its capacity to implement and report under the seven human rights treaties to which it has acceded, while addressing gender-based discrimination as a cross-cutting issue. OHCHR support included technical assistance through training and bilateral discussions with line ministries on treaty provisions, general comments and reporting guidelines. UN-Women and OHCHR supported the State of Palestine and the Independent Commission for Human Rights with technical assistance and resources to hold a national consultation on the draft State party report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. About 140 representatives of civil society organizations from both the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip attended the consultation. OHCHR and UN-Women also conducted a training for civil society organizations in Gaza and the West Bank on their role in the human rights treaty reporting and implementation process, which included technical discussions on using national consultations and shadow reporting to advocate for and promote women's human rights.

61. With support from ILO and in consultation with tripartite constituents, the social security law for private sector workers and their family members was adopted, and signed by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, on 7 March 2016. The law includes maternity protection insurance, which will support increased women's labour force participation and encourage employers to employ more women, by transferring the financial burden of covering maternity leave benefit from the employer to the social security fund.

62. In August 2016, the Ministry of Women's Affairs launched the national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Developed by the High National Committee for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and supported by UN-Women and ESCWA, among others, the plan establishes a comprehensive action framework in support of the efforts of the Palestinian Government, civil society and women's organizations to make the participation of women and the inclusion of their perspectives and needs in peace, security and humanitarian processes a reality.

63. Under the joint rule of law programme, UNDP and UN-Women provided support to justice and security institutions to mainstream a gender perspective in policies and procedures, including in the area of legislative drafting. The Palestinian Civil Police were supported in developing the first police gender strategy in the Arab region; the Council of Ministers held a series of national consultations for the finalization of the Family Protection Bill, which addresses domestic violence; and the Attorney General formalized a unit of Specialized Prosecutors for Protection of Family from Violence and appointed 19 specialized prosecutors, who receive continuing support from the joint programme. The joint programme provided technical support to the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior for the review and development of the social protection, justice and security sector strategies as well as technical support to the State of Palestine in the reporting process to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It also supported the Palestinian Civil Police in the refurbishment of one of its buildings to become a centre for women and girls victims of violence.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

64. **In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, fragmentation of the territory, lack of Palestinian unity, restrictions on access and movement, increased settlement expansion and violence and the closure of Gaza continued to impact negatively on the situation of Palestinian women. In Gaza, the humanitarian situation remains dire. The slow pace of recovery from the 2014 conflict is concerning and has exacerbated many of the protection concerns and challenges faced by women and girls described in previous reports. These include increased psychosocial stress, high unemployment rates, lack of livelihood opportunities, food insecurity, limited access to basic services, poor access to water, sanitation and energy, high rates of violence against women and lack of access to justice. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the surge in demolitions of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures during the reporting period and the associated displacement aggravated existing protection concerns. Restrictions on the freedom of movement continued to impact negatively on women's and girls' access to basic services, education and livelihood opportunities.**

65. **The rule of law remains a significant issue across the State of Palestine, with women and girls continuing to face significant challenges in accessing justice, including as a result of laws that discriminate on the basis of sex. More effort is needed to bring legislative frameworks into alignment with international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the**

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The preparation of the Palestine State Party report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women presents an important milestone in support of increased accountability of national systems with regard to women's human rights and gender equality, and in identifying and addressing discrimination against women, both in law and in practice. Areas where legislative reform must clearly be undertaken in order to achieve substantive equality include: adopting the Family Protection Bill, which protects women from domestic violence; revising the personal status law to align with obligations under the Convention related to equality in inheritance, divorce and child custody, among other issues; and revising the penal code to remove all references to mitigating circumstances in sentencing for family-related killings (so called "honour killings") and to introduce sentences for different types of sexual and gender-based violence.

66. **To advance the realization of women's human rights, continued technical support should be provided to Palestinian actors to fully engage with human rights treaty bodies and other relevant processes, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Human Rights Council and its special procedures, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.**[19] **Technical support should be provided to women's organizations to facilitate their participation in human rights processes and to ensure stronger collaboration between women's organizations and mainstream human rights organizations in engaging with the Human Rights Council.**

67. **Violence against women remains a serious protection concern in the State of Palestine and the situation is particularly acute in Gaza. In support of the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, the United Nations should build on efforts under way and continue to implement initiatives to improve women's access to justice and enhance the capacity of institutions and personnel to prevent and respond to violence against women. United Nations entities together with all key actors should support the implementation of a coordinated holistic, multisectoral approach to respond to violence against women and ensure availability of health care, psychosocial and legal assistance and counselling and economic empowerment, in line with the recommendations of the midterm review of the National Strategy.**

68. **United Nations system entities should increase prevention efforts, including initiatives aimed at mitigating the impact of the occupation and conflict on the increasing vulnerability and exposure of women and girls to violence, including settler violence, displacement, home demolitions and restrictions on movement.**

69. **Improving women's economic security and rights is key to supporting women's empowerment and protection at large. Policies aimed at expanding**

[19] In the context of the preliminary examination into the situation of Palestine, the Office of the Prosecutor has called upon interested parties to submit information on violations of women's rights in respect of crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

local production and creating jobs should support women's local production quality standards to enhance their potential to compete locally. Exploring opportunities for women's engagement in new economic sectors such as the information technology, manufacturing and tourism sectors would maximize opportunities for women's economic participation. As a further means of guiding young students and graduates away from an overcrowded professional sector, career counselling and technical and vocational education training services should be provided to enhance the attractiveness of technical careers. This should be coupled with making labour market information and job search mechanisms available to disadvantaged and marginalized female youth. In Gaza, given women's limited participation and economic opportunities to date, more attention must be paid to strengthening their participation in and opportunities generated by post-conflict recovery and reconstruction efforts.

70. Prospects of national and local elections continue to be a great challenge and women remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies at various levels of public life, the peace processes and national reconciliation efforts. It is therefore crucial to support long-term sustainable mechanisms to enhance the political representation and leadership of Palestinian women in a way that would set women's issues high on the national agenda. Consciousness of political rights and the building of transformative communities are significant conditions for creating an enabling environment that can influence the direction of politics and development in favour of women.

71. The United Nations continues to support the realization of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The promotion of women's human rights and empowerment remains essential to these efforts. The national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, launched by the State of Palestine in 2016, establishes a comprehensive action framework for making the participation of women and the inclusion of their perspectives and needs in peace, security and humanitarian processes a reality. The United Nations should support the implementation and monitoring of the national action plan and, in addition, utilize the opportunities presented by Security Council resolution 2242 (2015) for bringing violations of human rights and humanitarian law experienced by Palestinian women to the attention of the Security Council, including through the briefings of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

72. The overall increase in politically motivated violence during the reporting period is concerning, further threatening the prospects of peace. Finding a political solution to the conflict remains essential.